

When I was first introduced to the new Teacher Evaluation form about four years ago, my Principal rolled it out as a “help” document for teachers to improve what they felt were weaknesses in their practices. For instance, if I felt that my classroom management needed improvement, then I would ask my evaluating administrator to focus on that aspect of the evaluation when observing me. At the time, it felt like I was going to work with my evaluator to improve a weakness so as to make me a more effective teacher on the whole.

Four years later, this 12-page evaluation has become a subjective swashbuckling sword with which to cut apart an educator with the stroke of a pen. If an administrator for some random reason does not like a teacher, this document can be a conduit to his/her dismissal and defeats the original purpose of improving a weakness where a teacher may be struggling- Case in point- I know of a gifted teacher who has been teaching for fourteen years with solid and positive evaluations in her record who is now in danger of being dismissed because of the new system in place. Instead of helping the teacher improve in the areas of weakness, the administrator used the evaluation as a weapon for dismissal. Checking off a box can be very subjective. It is more useful and fair for the evaluator to write a reflection after viewing a lesson in order to laud the good parts of the lesson and make suggestions to the educator on ways to improve for the next time. This was the way it was done in the past. This way, it is more personal and thought provoking than checking off a box devised by a group of people who have not been in today’s classroom and expecting that the narrow choice of words next to each box adequately describes the plusses and minuses of the teacher. How cold. How impersonal. How ineffective. How ridiculous.

I compare the system in place to this; suppose there is a corporation with a majority of effective and productive workers, but also there are people hired who are slacking off and underperforming. What would the President of the company do? I believe he/she would concentrate on improving the performance of the slackers by calling them in one by one, addressing their individual issues and devise a plan specific to the worker’s deficiencies in order to help that worker improve in the company. I can’t imagine that every decent and hard working person in the company would have to comply with the deficient worker’s plan since they are doing their jobs correctly. In the education field now, every teacher, no matter how good or badly he is performing, must be judged by the lowest common denominator as written in the present evaluation. It is punishing the many for the crimes of the few. These evaluations would be better utilized as a plan for teachers who are not doing their jobs well rather than a threat to the ones who are.

The Performance Evaluation Advisory Council, whoever they are and whatever their educational experience, should take more time to visit classrooms in the state of Connecticut and really learn what’s going on before they create a multi-page document that judges what an educator does for the 183 days he is in the classroom. As every businessperson knows, low morale can negatively affect the success of a company. Teacher morale in this state is at an all time low due to a subjective, unfair evaluation system, which, even if a teacher is in the plus column, does not reflect or indicate the worth or expertise of that teacher, but rather reflects a Department of Education that takes shortcuts with everything-including people’s livelihoods and psyches.

My solution to this problem would be for evaluators to go back to writing lengthy, explicit and thoughtful evaluations based not only on a set of generic education skills that all teachers must master, but also commenting on practices relating to their specific area of expertise. This makes more sense to me. Let’s leave the survey type evaluations for the teachers

who truly need a more defined direction in honing their skills. Coupled with the written evaluation, an educator will benefit from a more comprehensive blueprint for success. It goes without saying that committees for creating these improved survey documents should include teachers from all disciplines and socio-economic school systems. And by the way, if legislators are earnest in their quest to improve education problems, perhaps they should schedule their hearings at a more appropriate time, or think about inviting educators from around the state to attend as a professional day. The way it was done this time only invites skepticism.

As I stated in my Op-Ed piece that appeared in the Connecticut Post on February 26, 2014, education is on a downward spiral, judging from the plummeting test scores, nebulous curriculums, scripted learning models and federalization of education. These elements are all unfairly connected to teacher evaluations, and until this problem is solved, quality people will be leaving the profession and quality people won't enter the profession. Thank you.

Sincerely,
Roberta C. Stone
122 Inwood Road
Fairfield, CT. 06825
203-257-0906